

Director's Remarks, May 2010

Performance

The last three months of 2009 were extremely successful. Our circulation last year rose from 64,000 in April 2009 to 90,000 in June 2009. Though we began spending under new budget priorities in October 2009, the effect of this change in focus did not become noticeable until January when we experienced our first drop in circulation. This April (61,926) we lost about 2,300 of our cumulative improvement in circulations (cumulative increase thru March was 35,000) compared to last year at the time (64,243 for April 2009).

The only branch continuing to show gains is Northgate. The issue does not appear to be lack of interest in library services. Despite declining use of our downtown facility, more people are using our branches than ever in our history. Use of our web page is virtually identical to last year. We at least doubled spending in each new priority area and tripled spending for children's materials, but many of the higher level subject area/school support collections downtown are no longer funded.

Facilities Master Plan & New Strategic Plan (Board approval requested)

Bob McNulty from the Partners for Livable Communities spent about 5 hours on Wednesday, May 5 touring Brainerd and our downtown building with a City/Library Task Force/River City delegation. Their primary focus was on visioning statements for the Brainerd development (David Barlew/Artech) and the downtown library (Professor Joshua Emig from Auburn). It is not in the best interest of the Library to be passive recipients as opposed to active participants in a plan for any future system.

Can we now join forces with the Regional Planning Agency and local governments to build a master plan for development? The City and County will spend the next fiscal year deciding our fate (renegotiating the sales tax agreement expiring in May 2011) based on where they think we ought to be headed. It seems in our best interest to work with them on a sustainable future, one based on available sources for funding. Without such a plan, we risk alienating communities like Soddy-Daisy that need a branch library, but also isolation from politically popular but poorly planned alternatives (e.g. Signal Mountain & East Ridge). The Brainerd community is building momentum for a new branch, but has a very nebulous sense of optimal placement and size. Several representing Soddy-Daisy have expressed frustration with our failure to offer a concrete plan for their area. Recent designs for a new downtown library by a group of Auburn graduate students raise questions about what we are doing to fix our problems downtown.

The Library Taskforce established a two-year strategic plan that will expire at the end of June 2011. We will need to begin planning the budget for the following year (FY2012) in about eight months. We have new data from national and local surveys of library patrons. Can we begin setting up a strategic planning effort with Karen McMahon and the Library Taskforce or on our own?

Close the Sunday before Memorial Day (Board approval requested)

With board approval, The Public Library – Downtown will be closed on Sunday May 30 because of the Memorial Day holiday on Monday, May 31.

Library Budget

Though it was always a long shot to expect that the City and County would be able to support the strong public demand for increased hours this year, we have a few more months to encourage support for our automation funds. More than ever, our future success hinges on quality library automation software. Typically, our main computer would have some sort of hardware issue every year. It has now been three years since we were informed that parts were no longer being made for it and that we needed to replace it as soon as possible. It is unrealistic to assume that we will be able to continue much longer without some kind of breakdown affecting all of our public services. If it happens, our options are very limited and grim. We will either need to request emergency funding for a new expensive computer (\$300,000 and about a month without service), or run out an emergency bid request for a new automation system (\$50,000 for a new computer and about \$100,000 for a partial upgrade of existing software and about 3 months to 6 months without service).

In 1996, when our automation consultant Sue Feinstein spoke to the City and County, she told them that they would need to commit to upgrades every 3 years at a cost of about \$340,000 each time or any money they awarded in 1996 would be wasted. This never happened. We now have an entire infrastructure that is overdue for replacement. Any piecemeal emergency work will be like putting an expensive new engine in a broken down used car. We need to find a way to do this right as soon as possible. Any help in supporting our existing automation request will be greatly appreciated.

Reorganization Downtown

Our bids for new radio frequency (RFID) labels and carpeting have been approved by the City and the RFID bid has been posted to vendors. We are on schedule to complete the transfer of all government documents to the third floor by the end of May. Presuming that the City also posts the carpet bid soon, we should be able to carpet the cleared half of the second floor, shift the nonfiction books from the other half over onto the new carpeted section, and carpet the other half of the floor well in advance of our October fundraiser. Once the transfer of government documents is complete, we will block access to the second floor until the coffee shop is complete. At the same time, we will continue massive weeding of the first, fourth, and ground floor collections.

Library Foundation (Board approval requested)

The Library Friends are concerned about possible repercussions from allowing the Library to use the Friends for pass-thru accounts such as ClubLib and grants. We need a 501-(c)3 organization set up for Library fundraising and development separate from the joint Endowment Fund which has strong restrictions on use. The Library requests board approval to establish a library foundation.